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ABSTRACT

This summary covers the experiences of the staff of the Unified Studies Program at Boston State College from September 1973 through August 1975. Included is: (1) the planning phase, (2) team building, (3) staff, (4) administrative support, (5) potential students, (6) compromises, (7) funding, (8) use of the learning contracts, () contract hours, and (10) the reapproval process. Some significant results of the program's activities during 1973-75 at Boston State College were: (1) the confrontation of faculty with the open classroom and unified educational theories, (2) a "second chance" alternative for some students, (3) an introduction to the nature of team teaching and "transdisciplinary" methodology, (4) an association with national concerns for educational change, and (5) insights into ways to simplify the change process at Boston State. (Author/KE)

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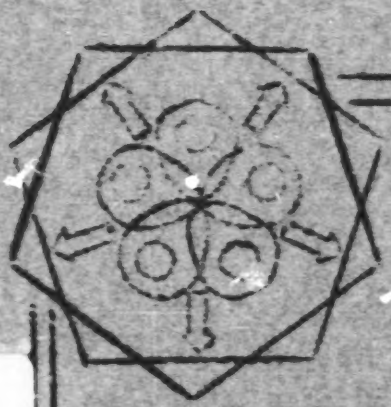

UNIFIED STUDIES — I:10

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

FINAL REPORT

(1975)

Warren Greeley
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FINAL REPORT

UNIFIED STUDIES PROGRAM

UNIFIED STUDIES REPORTS # I:10 (June, 1975)

[Note: for those who might read this final report, and who are unfamilar with the history, goals and components of the Unified Studies Program, it is suggested that copies of the previous Unified Studies Reports be secured:

I:1 "Report on the Visit to Evergreen State College" (May, 1974) W. Greeley, E. Otlewski, E. Traverso

I:2 "Unified Education at Boston State College, 1972-1974" (1974)

I:3 "Concepts of Unified Education" (1974) L. Humphreys

I:4 "Report of Student Survey" (1974) P. McDonough

I:5 "Program Evaluation" (1974-1975) P. McDonough

I:6 "Unified Studies Program Packet" (1975)

I:7 "Learning Contract" (1975)

I:8 "Philosophy of Unified Education" (1975) L. Humphreys

I:9 "Techniques of Unified Education" (1975) L. Humphreys

I:10 "Final Report" (1975)

The purpose of this final report is to summarize the experiences of the program staff over the past two years and to offer recommendations for other similar ventures.]

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PLANNING PHASE (SEPTEMBER 1973 - AUGUST 1974)

1) The primary problem of the planning phase for the Unified Studies Program was the "selling" of ideas (which appeared to many faculty to be "radical") by implicitly promising that the results of the "innovation" would satisfy "traditional" expectations. It is impossible to do both things at the same time. Either a program ventures boldly into new areas (with new educational goals) or it simply restates traditional goals in a new format.

The planning team met in the fall of 1973 as volunteer faculty who had the assistance of the Director of Program Development and Research and the promise of planning funds from the Office of the Provost if a "model" for interdisciplinary education could be developed and tested under the umbrella of Open College Projects. During the 1960's Boston State College had experienced the trauma of rapid expansion to meet new needs and by the mid seventies it was prepared to explore alternative curricula which would hopefully better serve its students.

Three such projects were funded by the Provost. The "unified instructional model" was to become the first. It would by a team taught (five faculty) interdisciplinary (economics, English, history, secondary education and sociology) program for eighty to one hundred undergraduates using "learning contracts", small group seminars, guest lecture series, workshops, etc. This model was an outgrowth of the educational "(r)evolution" of the sixties.

2) <u>Team Building</u> - The planning staff was composed of six junior faculty and one administrator. During the fall of 1973 their primary task was to prepare

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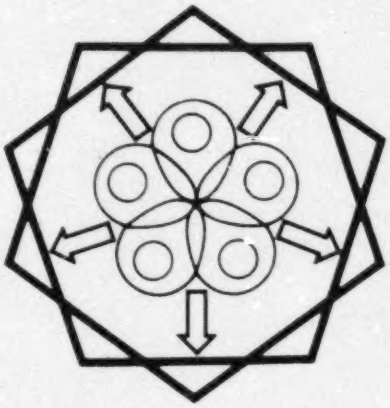
a grant proposal to the Board of Trustees which would release planning funds for the Spring term. This proposal was worked out at regular weekly evening meetings and one weekend workshop. It was submitted in November and favorably reviewed by the Provost in December.

A $20,000 grant gave faculty half time released time during the spring and provided funds for secretarial help, a research assistant and a part time planning consultant. The early phase is a key period in team building. By the time the grant was received the patterns of the group had become fairly rationalized. The critical elements for the success of the process were: support from the administration, a highly task oriented working goal, and the promise of funding should a solid proposal emerge.

3) Staff - The use of junior faculty in the planning phase resulted in both positive and negative outcomes. In terms of being "willing" volunteers the staff acquitted themselves well by working long hours and spending weekends preparing their program proposal for the college. On the other hand, in terms of stable membership and "legitimacy" the team lacked important characteristics. Faculty who are non-tenured (01 status), temporary appointees (03 status) and serving under terminal contracts often do not have the "clout" to seek approval for truly innovative programs. At best they must frequently couch the hope of new outcomes in the rhetoric of old goals.



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Two faculty had to leave the team during the planning phase, and one other person returned during implementation as a half time instructor. The loss of the person from sociology was particularly critical. Her contribution to the team effort was a sense of quick intensive insight coupled with lightness and clarity. It cannot be overstated that a faculty planning team should be a relatively solid and established group who do not have to sell themselves at the same time that they are selling new ideas.

As a result of the turnover of staff, the remaining faculty had to spend a great deal of time in affirmative action hiring for fall implementation. And when the program began in September 1974 it had three full time and four half time staff.

4) Administrative support - The planning team did have the full support of the administration of the college. It was predictable therefore that a few faculty saw the program as an administrative "plot". The team had to fend off such minority attacks but it is a tribute to the faculty at large that they supported the planning team in committees and departments as the program proposal made its way along the "approval route" during the spring term (1974).

The team had met with every major group and committee in the college before the program proposal was readied in order to solicit ideas. This too was a critical element in effective planning and also helps to account for the fact that

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when the team returned later for approval, the faculty were not "surprised" by any issue and that they therefore could move the proposal through committees rather rapidly. The program proposal was readied by March 15, 1974. It was approved by all five departments, and all campus wide faculty committees by the end of May. The administration reviewed the proposal and passed it on to the Board of Trustees and Provosts Office soon thereafter.

Thus the presence of administrative support was essential to the success of the planning process while at the same time faculty support was generated by "open" communication of concerns. Innovative programs ordered by administrative ukaz can quickly fail by the opposition of faculty. There must be a fine balance between faculty initiative and administrative reciptivity. The Unified Studies Program was fortunate to have both.

5) Potential students - Initially the planning team focussed on serving students "not currently at Boston State College." This meant seeking a new pool outside the college and hopefully finding a sizable group of drop-outs in good standing who were looking for an alternative. The staff now feels that this was a mistake. The results of this decision were (like most other decisions in the planning process) double edged. On the one hand it made it easier to sell the program to faculty who were wary of losing students from an already declining base. But on the other hand it meant that the planning team had to become its own recruitment office -- handling newspaper ads, mailings to thousands of

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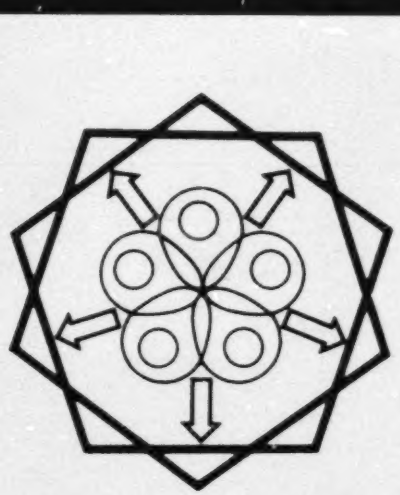
potential students, etc. It also meant that when the program began the students themselves were mostly new to Boston State and had little contact with non USP students as well as little legitimacy from the point of view of traditional faculty.

Finally, in terms of the student population, the team was faced with the insurmountable problem of recruiting one hundred students during the month of August (1974) since funding for start up was not granted until then. As a result, the program never attracted more than half its optimum complement. And students who have not yet made academic plans for full time college work by August 15th of a school year are a high risk group. In spite of these problems the program still attracted some very capable students.

6) Compromises - Experimental programs should begin with the least amount of administrative paperwork. The planning team found itself doing admissions, registration, affirmative action, etc. in addition to program approval seeking. Academic planning suffered. The team was frequently too busy to engage in the dialogue of proposed program content which is the core of real program planning.

The time spent on the approval process alone was quite burdensome (the team's recommendation is that a special process be developed for new programs at Boston State). And under the pressure to meet regularly, generate program ideas, receive feedback on these ideas plus do the hundreds of small administrative tasks which devolved to it, the planning team found itself spending an



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inordinate amount of energy on "structural" problems resulting in significant compromises. The most critical of these was the problem of "credit". To insure "transferability" of credit (and to ease the approval process) an egregious error in judgment was made: it was decided that students would be granted "course equivalency" credit. That is, the work that students did on their learning contracts would be translated into course numbers for already existing departmental course offerings.

In effect, this decision crippled the program. What it said was "Students will satisfy traditional course requirements in addition to the work prescribed for the program itself." And since two departments demanded that all students' work be reviewed either by committees or chairpersons of those departments, the result was that students could not be given credit until a group of faculty (other that their instructors) certified that their work met standards for a traditional survey course (though no departmental standards actually exist for such a course). The situation became a thicket. Students were unsure that they would receive credit. Faculty's academic prerogatives were greviously invaded. And in fact, students' contracts were examined by one whole department in open meeting. Innovation cannot exist in a fish bowl.

7) Funding - The planning grant ($20,000) given to the faculty covered the period of the Spring term 1974. It soon became apparent that one of the team's primary tasks was to generate outside funding for the subsequent test period.

As each compromise was incorporated into the program proposal the Unified Studies Program began to look less and less innovative. From the point of view of funding agencies it was "old wine in new bottles". The staff spent endless hours in writing unsuccessful grant applications. Finally, in August additional special projects funds ($45,000) were made available from the Board of Trustees. An accounting of the use of these special project funds is attached at the end of this report.

A decision to start up (rather than delay opening for one semester) was made by the staff in late July and in retrospect this was probably a good choice. The budget "crunch" which has since hit the state of Massachusetts probably would have precluded a future start up in any case.

On the other hand, because of the lateness of the start up decision, no real test of the model could take place since a full enrollment of students could not be achieved. The low student enrollment in turn led to the admission of students who turned out to be unsuited for such a program. This had a deleterious effect upon faculty and student morale (particularly during the second semester)

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II

IMPLEMENTATION (SEPTEMBER 1974 - JUNE 1975)

8) Use of Learning Contracts - The choice of learning contracts (with negotiated grades) as a vehicle for accountability had mixed results. New staff hired for the program were at a distinct disadvantage having only a few weeks introduction to the team prior to the opening of the program. The fact that four faculty were half time meant that they also had commitments elsewhere -- and individually negotiated learning contracts are a very time consuming device. In addition, only two of the faculty had previously used a contract system in their own classes.

Negotiations during the first semester were protracted (eighty percent of the students actually completed negotiations). The course equivalency concept and review by departmental committees meant that students were asked to contract for far more work than could be reasonably done by them (taking into consideration the fact that most students also had jobs and commitments outside of school -- cf. Student Surveys, #I:4,5).

Still, many of the students completed all of their contract work, and a few had outstanding portfolios. The students who continued in the program during the second semester fared much better than those who entered in January, and by then the staff had modified the contract forms (cf. Program Packet #I:6) and were themselves more comfortable with the negotiating process.

The staff recommends that in the future a "base line contract" system be

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used since the completely individualized instructional orientation of a regular contract system makes group work far more difficult. Thus under a base line system there would be some common reading required for seminar preparation.

9) Contact hours - The problem of structuring contact hours is exceedingly vexing in a team taught situation. When it became apparent in late August that the program would be underenrolled, it was decided to admit students, who by and large were working full time jobs, into a night group. This meant that the staff affectively repeated all of the program activities from the day program for the night group. Half time people took responsibility for the night program, but day faculty also participated in order to maximize the interdisciplinary and team taught nature of the experience.

Even without this extra commitment however, a traditional contact hour quota cannot be imposed on team teaching since all faculty must be present at sometimes while only one or two might attend other activities. Certainly faculty should anticipate that in a model such as the Unified Studies Program their contact hours with students will range from twenty five to thirty five hours per week.

10) The re-approval process - In January, 1975, just three months after beginning the program, the staff had to once again go through the process of "re-approval" for 1975-1976. This meant preparing a renewal proposal and submitting it to the five departments, the campus wide curriculum committee, the

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all campus committee, etc. This became an exercise in frustration. The evaluation of the program was incomplete by the time the calendar deadlines approached. The tremendous problems of student population, newness of structure, and administrative paperwork had already taken a toll. Now the specter of a new round of committee meetings, attacks by unsympathetic faculty and program insecurity loomed.

Students' work from the first semester was scrupulously examined by faculty from two departments -- some of whom did not agree with the basic goals of the program. In spite of this, both the English and History departments split evenly on votes to renew the program. It is testimony to the resilience of these departments that they were willing to give the program additional time to work out its problems.

One last compromise was acheived and the program was recommended for adoption as an interdisciplinary minor (one semester). This was a critical compromise and ultimately will undermine the effectiveness of the program since it is impossible to achieve the program goals of attitudinal and skills development in one brief semester of a student's academic work. It is hoped that Unified Studies in the future can become a two or four year "alternative" experience for students.

In the future, it is recommended that all new projects be given a three to five year charter and that the re-approval process be allowed to wait until some

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of the "bugs" can be worked out of a new system of instruction.

11) Summary - On balance, a number of very significant things happened as a result of the Unified Studies Program's activities during 1973-1975: a) A large number of faculty were confronted with the open classroom and unified educational theories postulated (and tested) during the 1960's in elementary and secondary education. By and large these were given a very favorable acceptance by a strong majority of the college's faculty; b) some students were given a "second chance" alternative and succeeded fairly well in meeting the challenge; c) the staff learned a great deal about the nature of team teaching and "trans-disciplinary" methodology. They also developed esprit and a sensitivity towards each other that was a welcome relief from the isolation of the lonely classroom; d) the college as a whole began to become associated with national concerns for educational change (e.g. through the state system's participation in the Project on Change in Liberal Education and the awarding of a Danforth Fellowship to one of the team members for study of interdisciplinary education at Stanford University); and e) some insights into ways to simplify the change process at Boston State have been articulated. Thus the staff's recommendations are as follows:

Recommendations:

1) A program should be given a test period of at least three years or should be conceived of simply as a one year program which will not continue. Living

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in a fish bowl, subject to constant review by all members of the college community and dependent upon their approval for the continuation of the program, caused the team to make many decisions which were, in the long-run, obstructive to its primary goals. Because the team had to be excessively concerned with its initial student-teacher ratio, despite late funding and recruitment of students, all students who applied, were accepted whether or not they were suited to this type of program, and the staff spent an inordinate amount of time trying to keep students in who were not really motivated enough to benefit from the program, even calling them at home to remind them of regularly scheduled meetings. The staff's attempts to satisfy individual departments put too much emphasis on course-equivalency work in each field, which detracted from the unified nature of the program. They felt compelled to schedule the traditional number of contact hours in traditional activities, seminars, etc., not including such whole-program activities as outside speakers and media and not considering the nature of team teaching which required everyone's presence at almost every activity. Again the result was that the staff's own resources were overextended unnecessarily. And the amount of time spent on the re-approval process itself, beginning in January with return visits to each group which had just been visited the previous spring, was enormous, and left no time or energy for other such important activities such as the sharing of content in a special faculty seminar. Staff all spent many times the number of hours spent in ordin-

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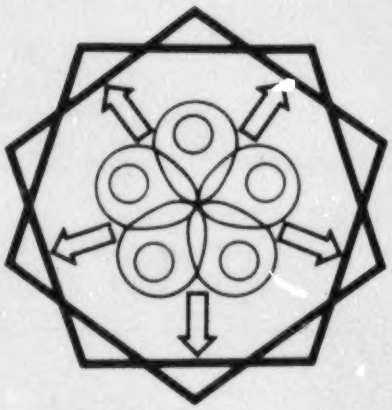
ary teaching or activities related to Unified Studies, yet a disproportionate amount of this time had nothing at all to do with teaching. Such an energy drain is inimicable to good teaching and to the process of change itself.

2) An institutional base for new programs and for courses which fall outside of departmental lines should be established. An existing administrative unit, set up to house such programs, would certainly have relieved the program of the enormous burden of administrative work that fell on the staff as they did their own recruitment, admissions, budget, etc. And it would probably have provided a legitimacy which would obviate the need for such an involved approval/re-approval process. As it was, the fact that the program was housed, for an experimental year only, with the Director of Program Development and Research who was concurrently proposing a study of General Education that was seen by some academic departments as a direct threat to their future existence made the Unified Studies Program the focus of many faculty fears. A legitimate department of experimental programs or some such house would allay the fears that a new program was being used as an administrative weapon.

3) Educational change cannot occur at a time when job security is severly threatened. It is difficult to find faculty who are willing to risk their jobs or their chance of tenure to take part in a new program that is seen as a threat by those very colleagues who will be making the job or tenure decisions. And it is extremely difficult for the foolhardy few to get anything but strong



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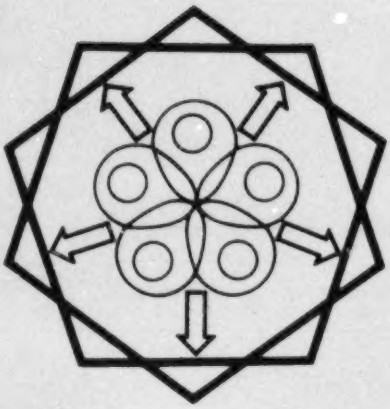
opposition to a program which is seen as a threat to traditional departments and therefore to the job security of their members. That almost half of the History and English departments voted to continue granting credit through the program, despite these risks, and that the all-college curriculum committee voted, with only two opposed, to establish Unified Studies as a minor program which could grant its own credit, speaks favorably of the concern for education among BSC faculty, as well as for the time spent by the USP team on educating other faculty about the program. Yet much less time would have been needed for this task in a more secure, and therefore receptive environment.

4) A new program should be autonomous, and should grant its own credit. The Unified Studies Program should not have tried to give regular departmental credit for work "equivalent to" that done in the department's regular offerings. This undermined the viability of the program as a real alternative to the regular offerings, forced the staff to incorporate workshops that had nothing to do with the central topic but were designed simply to satisfy departmental course requirements, and left the staff vulnerable to the charge that they were not, in fact, covering any given course in the way it would be covered in the department and that therefore the students work should not be certified. Although there is room for much legitimate disagreement about what should be covered and how it should be covered in any standard course, in the faculty's attempts to meet everyone's expectations they ended up with much less academic freedom than



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they would have had teaching the same material in their regular departments. The staff's conception of "equivalent" was quite different from that of some of their collegues. It is a contradiction in terms to establish an innovative program that is rundamentally the same as regular offerings.

5) The most essential ingredient of any team-taught program is a good working team. The team should consist wholly of full-time faculty who are able to remain together through both the planning and implementation stages, preferably drawn from the regular faculty of the school. The USP was significantly affected by the loss of one faculty member between the planning and implementation phase because full-time 03 hiring was discontinued and no full-time 01 hiring was allowed, and by the half-time loss of two other people being paid on the 03 account. The team was forced to begin teaching with four half-time people who had other job commitments, two of whom had not participated in planning in addition to one totally new full-time person. This seriously undermined the team-building that had gone on during planning stages. And with students at the door (hiring could not be done until August), there was no time for new team members to contribute to and become accustomed to the model. Within the program, team-building activities should have high priority and should not be neglected (as was often done this year), for administrative chores. It would be valuable to hire an outside consultant to conduct monthly team-building sessions. The faculty content seminar, which this year's team

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neglected under increasing external pressure which demanded that the time be used for program decisions and other administrative work, should also have high priority.

6) Students should be drawn from the regular student body, although supplemented by recruitment from other groups. Unified Studies Program students themselves felt that they, and the program, lacked legitimacy. They had little contact with non-USP students and, because they did not fit into a regular administrative category, they did not receive tuition bills or grades until many months after regular students. They were in continual fear that they would not receive credit for their work. Further, all of their completed work had to be made available to all members of all departments involved and was one criterion on which the whole re-approval of the program rested. This was not only an invasion of privacy but an unfair presence to placed on just one student group. Regular students entering a new program would already have had their work certified by other members of the faculty, which would eliminate the demand for continual quality checks on their work within the program. The staff feels that it made a mistake in suggesting that the program would recruit students who had dropped out in good standing from the regular undergraduate program. Not only did the "in good standing" tend to be forgotten by other faculty who quickly labeled all the students as "drop-outs" but in fact these students were the worst risks upon which to build a new program. There apparently are not large

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numbers of highly motivated students who have dropped out and are simply looking for the right alternative. Those who were not motivated to stay in the regular program were not inclined to do much work in Unified Studies either, and the best in the Unified Studies Program were a few new freshmen who were motivated enough to make an alternative choice, and a large group of older students (over 25) who had clear educational goals and did not want to return to a traditional classroom. These students were also most comfortable with the integrative nature of learning in the program.

7) It may be necessary to consider smaller-scale alternatives to existing programs. It is possible that Unified Studies, with its goal of 100 students and five faculty, was just too large for Boston State College. There simply may not be 100 students who are interested in a full-time alternative program, with all the risks that such a program involves, yet present course scheduling and faculty load requirements make smaller, one or two course experiments unlikely, while the jealous preservation of departmental autonomy makes interdisciplinary cooperation within the existing structure extremely difficult. Again, a new house to give such efforts legitimacy, to open the way for any combination of faculty to create a new offering, would do much to improve the scope and quality of education at Boston State College.

8) Finally, efforts to effect change should not be neglected. Boston State College is significantly behind other schools in alternative offerings. Even Unified Studies, while it was too drastic a change for Boston State College was rejected as not innovative enough to receive funding by outside agencies. Alternative programs are already a requirement for teacher certification, and are likely to be considered by other accrediting agencies as well. And it is extremely important to the future of Boston State College as a liberal arts institution that humanities-based alternatives not be neglected in the face of expanding career preparation. The Board of Trustees should be prepared to continue to support experimental programs within the state colleges, even with out promise of outside funding.

SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES

UNIFIED STUDIES PROGRAM

September 1, 74 - June 24, 1975

		Grant total
Expenditures:		*$45,000.00*
Replacement faculty	*$32,282.00*	
Support Staff	*9,185.26*	
Equipment	*983.12*	
Supplies	*2,367.08*	
	TOTAL	*44,817.46*
	REMAINING	*$ 182.54*

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